

State of the Practice – 2014

Metropolitan and Regional Transportation Planning in Iowa



December 2014

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This report was developed from questionnaires filled out by staff of all 27 of Iowa's multi-jurisdictional transportation planning agencies, which include 9 metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and 18 regional planning affiliations (RPAs). The purpose of the survey was to gather information on the state of the practice of metropolitan and regional transportation planning in Iowa, and use that information to paint a picture of current planning activities for the planning agencies, Iowa DOT, and other interested parties.

MPOs and RPAs were offered the opportunity to suggest questions for the survey ahead of its distribution, and several agencies provided topics to be included. The final questionnaire involved 54 questions gathering information in the following areas.

- Basic information about the planning agency and MPO/RPA structure
- Training and resource needs, as well as peer exchange opportunities
- Equipment and technology resources used at the agency
- Planning activities undertaken by the agency
 - Transportation Planning Work Program (TPWP)
 - Public Participation
 - Passenger Transportation Plan (PTP)
 - Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and Programming Process
 - Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)
 - Miscellaneous Planning

The following report summarizes the responses to each question. Planning agencies were assured that their individual answers would not be shared; thus, each response is summarized in a general fashion. There are two exceptions to this where specific examples from planning agencies are provided. Each planning agency granted permission for those items to be shared. Six planning agencies serve as staff for both an MPO and RPA. Depending on the nature of the question, the answer may be structured based on 27 responses (all MPOs and RPAs individually), or 21 responses (the 21 planning agencies that serve as an MPO and/or an RPA).

This report is intended to be utilized by planning agencies to develop an understanding of how planning activities are carried out at their peer agencies, and provide ideas for their own planning process. Agencies interested in learning more about methods or processes mentioned in the report are encouraged to contact the Iowa Department of Transportation's (DOT) Office of Systems Planning, which can facilitate contact with planning agencies using those methods.

This report also provides the Iowa DOT with direction for areas in which guidance or additional resources would be useful. The Iowa DOT will work to address these needs through resource documents, training opportunities, and ongoing MPO and RPA quarterly meetings.

It is anticipated that this questionnaire will be updated and repeated in the future to track changes and advances in the planning process and to continue to provide valuable information to the Iowa DOT and the metropolitan and regional planning agencies across the state.

The Iowa DOT wishes to express its appreciation to the staff of Iowa's MPOs and RPAs for completing the questionnaire, and for carrying out a continuous, cooperative, and comprehensive transportation planning and programming process that improves the transportation system for all Iowans.

Basic Information

1. Please provide the names and job titles of agency staff currently involved in transportation planning, along with a brief description of their primary roles/responsibilities.

Some agencies listed all personnel that are involved in transportation activities, while some listed specifically those who spend the majority of their time on transportation, so it is difficult to draw inferences or develop comparative statistics. However, the number of staff members mentioned ranged from two to nine, with MPOs and joint agencies mentioning an average of six people, and standalone RPAs mentioning an average of four people.

2. Please attach a copy of your MPO or RPA's current bylaws or provide a web link for them.

Most agencies provided copies of their bylaws. One interesting note relates to the dates bylaws were last updated or amended. The average date of the last update/amendment was 2006, and the median date was 2008. While many agencies have updated their bylaws in recent years, there are three agencies whose bylaws were last updated prior to 2000. While there may be no need for frequent updates or amendments, agencies are encouraged to review their bylaws with their Policy Board and Technical Committee on a regular basis, perhaps by tying this review to the development of their TPWP or LRTP.

Any agencies that are interested in reviewing other examples of bylaws or discussing possible updates to their bylaws should contact their District Planner or the Office of Systems Planning.

3. Do you provide any type of written or verbal orientation to new Policy Board or Technical Committee members? Do you have any overview documents that describe what your MPO or RPA does?

Of 21 agencies, three responded that they do not provide any type of orientation to new Policy Board or Technical Committee members. Those that do provide orientation generally fall into the following categories (some agencies use more than one method).

- Provide overview documents (9 agencies)
- Hold orientation meetings with new members (7 agencies)
- Have informal verbal orientation with new members (4 agencies)
- Hold individual orientation meetings with new members upon request (2 agencies)

Documents provided to new members range from existing planning documents that provide an overview of the planning process (such as the TPWP) to documents created specifically for orienting new members or providing basic information on the planning agency. Examples of orientation and public outreach documents include:

- [DMAMPO overview presentation](#)
- [INRCOG background information handout](#)
- [MPOJC overview document](#)
- [RPA 10 brochure](#)

4. How often do your Policy Board and Technical Committee meet, and do they meet separately or jointly? If separately, do Technical Committee members regularly attend Policy Board meetings? What are typical topics for Technical Committee meeting agendas?

Of the nine MPOs, eight meet separately and one meets jointly. For the 18 RPAs, ten meet separately, six meet jointly, and two noted that they primarily meet separately, but occasionally hold joint meetings.

In terms of number of meetings, Policy Boards generally meet slightly more often than Technical Committees. There was a wide range in the number of meetings held annually, reported below. Some agencies also have an Executive Committee, which may meet on a different schedule.

	MPOs	RPAs
Number of Policy Board Meetings		
Average	9	8
Median	9	7
High	12	12
Low	4	3
Number of Technical Committee Meetings		
Average	9	6
Median	12	6
High	12	12
Low	2	2

In response to the question on what Technical Committees typically meet for, the most common answers involved recommendations on the various planning documents. The TIP was mentioned most often as a Technical Committee item, particularly with regard to application development, project solicitation, project ranking, and consideration of amendments. Many agencies noted that the Technical Committee agenda largely reflects the Policy Board’s agenda, with one agency noting that the Technical Committee may go into more detail or receive additional presentations on agenda items that later go before the Policy Board. Those agencies whose Technical Committees meet less often tended to only identify TIP-related topics as Technical Committee agenda items.

5. Please list your voting members (by jurisdiction or entity, not name) or describe your voting structure for your Policy Board and Technical Committee.

There is a wide variation in the number of voting members for Policy Boards and Technical Committees, shown on the following table. The numbers are specifically voting members – many boards include additional non-voting members. Also, the number of voting members is often higher than the number of jurisdictions/agencies represented by those votes, as many agencies have jurisdictions with multiple votes.

	MPOs	RPA's
Number of Policy Board Voting Members		
Average	17	14
Median	14	13
High	39	27
Low	9	5
Number of Technical Committee Voting Members		
Average	17	12
Median	16	11
High	31	21
Low	11	6

In terms of Policy Board and Technical Committee structure, primary voting members are county and city representatives. Of the nine MPOs, seven Policy Boards include at least one voting representative that is not a city or county. These other voting members include representatives of public transit agencies, state DOTs, airports, universities, and planning agencies. Seven of the nine Technical Committees also include non-city or county voting representation, including the entities listed for Policy Boards as well as other interests, such as school districts, economic development groups, and bicycle/pedestrian groups.

Of the 18 RPA's, six include non-city or county voting representation on their Policy Boards, and 13 include such voting representation on their Technical Committees. In addition to the agencies mentioned for MPOs, some RPA's also have private sector voting representation on both committees.

6. Outside of your Policy Board and Technical Committee, what other standing committees are part of your planning process? Examples could include a Transportation Alternatives Program Committee, Transit Advisory Group, Multi-Disciplinary Safety Team, etc. How often does each committee meet and what level of participation do they have?

MPOs and RPA's facilitate and participate in a wide variety of committees. MPOs tend to have or be involved with more committees than RPA's – the average response for MPOs was about five committees, while RPA's averaged two to three. RPA committees predominately fell into three categories – Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) or bicycle/pedestrian committee, Transit Advisory Group (TAG), and Multi-Disciplinary Safety Team (MDST). A few RPA's also noted subcommittees for highways or TIP projects, and participation in county-level trail groups.

In addition to TAP or bicycle/pedestrian groups, TAGs, and MDSTs, MPOs more frequently mentioned other subcommittees of the Technical Committee or Policy Board, such as Surface Transportation Program (STP), Planning, Engineering, and LRTP subcommittees. Freight committees were mentioned by two MPOs, and several MPOs were involved in environmental groups, with topics including air quality/climate change, Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP), livable communities, Blue Zones, and health. Technology groups, such as model, data, GIS, and ITS-related were also mentioned. Committees related to chambers of commerce and school districts were also mentioned.

7. If you have had any recent job postings for transportation planning staff, what level of interest have you received? Where do you advertise openings? Have you had any issues with finding qualified applicants?

Agencies generally reported a fair number of candidates for recent openings. Two primary exceptions to this occurred.

- It was noted by multiple agencies that hiring more experienced planners was a challenge, particularly for technical or modeling positions.
- A couple RPAs noted challenges with attracting qualified applicants, perhaps somewhat due to rural locations.

A wide variety of mediums are used for advertising open positions. Those cited by agencies included:

- Agency's own website
- Nearest regional newspaper
- Universities/colleges
- Iowa DOT
- Iowa Association of Regional Councils
- Iowa Workforce Development
- State and National American Planning Association
- National Association of Development Organizations
- Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations
- American Public Works Association
- Planetizen
- NeoGov
- Career Builder
- Monster.com

Training, Peer Exchanges, and Resource Documents

1. What type of training do you provide new transportation planners? Would you be interested in the Iowa DOT developing information or new employee training covering the transportation planning and programming process in Iowa?

Most agencies provide some level of on the job training, though few mentioned a formal training process. Most agencies felt that the Iowa DOT should consider providing some type of new employee orientation or training. Common responses regarding agency training included:

- Having new employees review planning documents
- Involving new employees in a wide variety of meetings and activities
- One-on-one training with management or transportation director
- Utilizing existing staff members to mentor new employees
- Utilizing state and federal seminars, classes, and resources

Several RPAs noted that they have had little turnover, which makes the need for training much more infrequent. However, if transportation planning duties are largely handled by one staff member and that person leaves, that could result in a challenging situation.

2. Does the structure and schedule of MPO and RPA quarterly meetings work well for your agency? Are there items or issues that you would like to see added to the agenda (or not included on the agenda)?

Almost all agencies said that MPO and RPA quarterly meetings generally work well. There were several suggestions offered for the structure and topics of quarterly meetings.

Structure-related comments included:

- Consider Iowa DOT staff traveling to different agencies to hold regional meetings.
- Facilitate more discussion, perhaps via small groups discussing specific topics.
- Many comments were made related to web-based meetings, with the majority appreciating that format during the winter. There were a couple comments in favor of more web-based meetings, and a couple of comments stating a dislike for web-based meetings.
- Meetings can be repetitive for agencies that function as both an MPO and RPA.
- More senior staff should be encouraged to attend.

Topic suggestions included:

- Continue to provide state and federal funding and legislative updates
- Best practices for various planning documents
- Developing fiscal constraint for LRTPs
- In-depth focus on particular documents, such as the August 2014 PTP workshop
- Peer project presentations
- Suggestions for transportation projects and activities outside of core planning documents

3. Are there any particular types of data that you've had trouble finding or obtaining for your planning process or documents?

The following types of data were mentioned. Iowa DOT will continue to work on improving data access for those items which are under its purview, and will provide data resources and updates to planning agencies as it is able. Agencies are encouraged to contact their District Planner or the Office of Systems Planning when they are having trouble locating data.

- Assessor parcels
- Data/analysis related to air quality
- Employment data
- Freight data at the regional level
- Funding spent on transportation
- GIS-type data for agencies with limited GIS capabilities
- High resolution orthographic imagery for some areas of the state
- Information on environmentally sensitive areas
- Peak hour traffic volumes in shapefile format
- Pipeline data
- Road condition data
- Sign inventories
- Tools for analyzing road design alternatives
- Traffic data in a GIS format
- Traffic management system data
- Traffic projections
- Trail counts
- Turn movement counts
- Vehicle miles traveled for an MPO or RPA
- Zoning and land use information

4. Do you have any recent planning activities or projects you'd be willing to share as part of a peer exchange at an MPO or RPA quarterly meeting?

Several agencies offered activities and projects as potential peer exchange items. Iowa DOT will work to integrate these into upcoming quarterly meetings. The following activities were mentioned; some were offered by more than one agency.

- Air quality strategic plan
- Bicycle/pedestrian plan
- Bike rack partnership
- Complete streets development
- Coordination transportation plan
- Corridor management plan with land use focus
- Development of fixed route transit service
- Electric vehicle readiness study
- Evacuation resource guide
- Household travel survey results
- Methodology for traffic signal changes at existing interchanges
- On-street bike lane feasibility

- Performance measures in long range plan
- Port authority creation and activities
- Production and dissemination of plan documents
- Rail port study
- Regional transit vision
- Retroreflectivity activities
- Smart planning
- Smarter travel project
- Traffic counting program
- Traffic sign program
- Traffic speed indicator sharing program
- Transit feasibility study
- Transportation alternatives project development
- Walkability audits
- Walking school bus project

5. What is your comfort level with interpreting federal legislation, rulemakings, and code? Would you like additional guidance from the DOT, FHWA, or FTA on the federal requirements for the transportation planning process?

Most agencies reported that they were relatively comfortable with the requirements of the transportation planning process. Specific areas where additional guidance would be appreciated included:

- Clarification on whether particular federal regulations apply to RPAs
- Definitive direction from Iowa DOT on issues like RPA suballocation
- Guidance on performance measure requirements of MAP-21, including for multi-state MPOs and for RPAs
- Providing direction for how regulations can be implemented through the planning process
- Summary sheets of new rules and regulations
- Title VI requirements
- Translating federal requirements into simpler terms for planning agencies

6. Do you utilize the Planning Resource Guide? How could it be improved to be more useful for planning agencies?

Most agencies responded that they do utilize the Planning Resource Guide or intend to use it more often. Two main areas were suggested for improvement.

- Include additional best practices and up-to-date links to planning documents from other agencies, as well as their websites.
- Provide links to other offices, specifically Program Management and Local Systems.

7. Past Iowa DOT resource documents have included Transportation Planning and the Environment and Best Practices for Regional Transportation Project Selection. Are there other topics you would be interested in the Iowa DOT providing resource documents on?

Areas suggested for additional resource documents included:

- Best practices for vision, goals, objectives, and performance measures for LRTPs
- Iowa case studies on interesting transportation topics, such as complete streets and roundabouts
- LRTP fiscally constrained plan
- Performance-based planning
- Scenario planning
- Technical Committee and Policy Board responsibilities related to MAP-21
- Title VI
- TPWP best practices
- Travel demand modeling, including multi-modal modeling

8. What is your comfort level with developing goals, objectives, performance measures, and performance targets? Would training in this area be useful to your agency as we begin to see requirements that elements of MAP-21 be implemented?

Almost all agencies responded that more training would be useful, particularly with regard to the performance-based planning requirements of MAP-21. Iowa DOT will continue to coordinate with planning agencies on these requirements as MAP-21 draft and final rulemakings are released.

Equipment and Technology Information

1. Does your agency own traffic counters, trail counters, retroreflectometers, or other such equipment? If so, please describe what type, how many, and if/how the equipment is lent out to jurisdictions or otherwise utilized. Would you be willing to loan your equipment to other planning agencies when it is not in use?

Seven of the nine MPOs reported owning some type of equipment. The following types of equipment were mentioned:

- GPS units
- iPad minis
- Retroreflectometers
- Traffic analyzers (collect vehicle speed and volume data)
- Traffic counters
- Traffic data collectors (intersection counters for vehicles/bicycles/pedestrians)
- Traffic speed shields
- Trail counters

Of the stand-alone RPAs, two noted housing equipment, which included traffic counters, trails counters, and retroreflectometers.

Several of the agencies with equipment noted that they would be willing to lend the items to another planning agency if they were not being used. If a planning agency is considering purchasing any of the types of equipment mentioned above, they are encouraged to contact the Office of Systems Planning for more information on which agencies have this type of equipment and could be contacted for information or a possible equipment loan.

2. Has your agency collected sign or sidewalk inventories or any other type of data utilizing GIS or GPS technology?

Of 21 agencies, 15 noted collecting or creating some type of data with GIS or GPS technology. Types of data that were cited included sign inventories, sidewalk and/or trail inventories, traffic signals, and utility maps. Ways of collecting this data that were mentioned included using air photos, utilizing GPS devices to collect location and condition information, and using mobile apps like My Tracks and Track My Run.

3 & 4. Does your organization have GIS software and staff that is trained in using it? Do you provide in-house training? What GIS software do you use? How many employees utilize GIS? (4.) If you utilize ArcGIS, what license level(s) is your organization using? Are you using any extensions?

Of 21 agencies, all but one have GIS software in-house. The number of employees utilizing GIS at the agency ranged from one to as many as six or more. While standalone MPOs and joint MPO/RPAs averaged slightly more employees utilizing GIS than standalone RPAs, there was a wide range, with MPOs having as few as one employee and RPAs having as many as four employees.

All 20 agencies with GIS software are utilizing an ESRI product. Most noted ArcGIS 10 or later, though three agencies are still using an earlier version. Most agencies appear to be utilizing the ArcGIS for Desktop Basic level, though two agencies noted using ArcEditor (now ArcGIS for Desktop Standard), and one noted using ArcInfo (now ArcGIS for Desktop Advanced). Two MPOs utilize an enterprise license.

Seven agencies noted using one or more extensions, including:

- Spatial Analyst – six agencies
- 3D Analyst – four agencies
- Network Analyst – two agencies
- MapLogic – one agency

Regarding training, most agencies use a combination of in-house or self-taught (tutorial) training along with outside courses when they are available.

5. What funding source(s) do you use for purchasing GIS licenses and paying maintenance fees?

Ten agencies noted paying for GIS expenses at least partially with federal transportation planning funds. Seven agencies responded that GIS expenses are paid for with local or non-transportation funds. Two agencies noted that GIS costs are spread amongst contracts or programs that involve or require GIS work. One agency did not mention the funding source for GIS.

6. For MPOs, do you utilize any modeling software other than TransCAD?

Six MPOs responded that they do not use other types of modeling software. The other three MPOs do use TransCAD, but also mentioned the use of other software for modeling and/or specific purposes, including CUBE, Envision Tomorrow, Synchro, Simtraffic, and Highway Capacity Software 2010.

7. Have you utilized any unique web services or technology as part of your planning process?

Examples could include custom Google Maps, SketchUp, ArcGIS Online, Prezi, Pictochart, online survey providers, etc. Please describe any useful services that you've utilized and how they helped your planning process.

Many examples of web services and technology were cited. The following table includes a list of services/websites, the number of times a service was mentioned, and a brief description of the service.

Service	Number of Times Mentioned	Basic function/description
Google Products	16	Includes Map, Earth, Drive, and Calendar
ArcGIS Online	7	Web-based mapping
SketchUp	7	3D modeling software
Survey Monkey	7	Web-based surveys
Prezi	4	Presentation software
Mindmixer	2	Web-based public involvement
Piktochart	2	Graphic-based information
Anymeeting	1	Free online meetings
Asana	1	Team organization and communication
Community Analyst	1	ESRI web tool
Constant Contact	1	Web-based marketing
Doodle	1	Web-based polls
DropBox	1	Web-based file storage
ESRI Storymaps	1	ESRI interactive map/multimedia content
FreeConferenceCall	1	Conference calls
GPS Kit for iPhone	1	Mobile app for GIS
Pictometry	1	Aerial photography
Weebly	1	Web hosting service
Wix	1	Web development platform
Wordle	1	Word cloud generator

Planning Activities

Transportation Planning Work Program

1. Outside of providing a draft TPWP for review, do you formally solicit activities for your work program from your Policy Board and/or Technical Committee?

Of the 27 agencies, only about a third specifically solicit activities for the TPWP prior to developing the draft document.

This is a common review finding for RPAs and MPOs. Agencies should be soliciting potential TPWP activities from their Technical Committee and Policy Board prior to developing a draft TPWP.

2. If your agency is not spending all its federal transportation planning funding and thus has carryover funding from year to year, please describe why. Would you be able to utilize all available federal funding in a timely manner if required?

In SFY 2015, 15 of 27 agencies have some level of carryover due to unprogrammed SFY 2015 planning funds, or due to less than 100% of their SFY 2014 budget being spent. While the Iowa DOT allows carryover, it encourages agencies to use their federal transportation planning funds in a timely manner and not allow carryover balances to grow to an excessive amount. Iowa DOT also encourages agencies to share their new planning targets and carryover balances with their Technical Committee and Policy Board during TPWP development.

The most commonly cited reasons for having a carryover balance included:

- Flexibility that a carryover balance affords
- Saving for the LRTP update or another large project
- Transportation staff spending time on other projects
- Uncertainty of future federal funding
- Understaffed or staff turnover

All agencies that responded to the question of whether or not they would be able to utilize all federal transportation planning funding in a timely manner noted that they would be able to do so with appropriate notice.

3. How is the local match provided for your federal transportation planning funds? For example, is it through per capita dues, paid for by jurisdictions represented on the Policy Board, or in some other manner? Have you had any trouble obtaining the necessary local match for your federal funds?

Per capita basis or membership dues were cited by about half of the agencies. Other methods mentioned for funding part or all of the local match included:

- General fund or contracts
- Paid by Policy Board entities (methods included per capita, equal split among counties, and basing on road mileage and transit service)
- State Councils of Governments assistance

Public Participation

1. Describe any public participation techniques other than traditional public hearings that your agency has utilized recently. Have these efforts resulted in meaningful public participation?

Several agencies discussed types of public participation techniques that they have utilized. Several examples are listed here; those that were mentioned as most successful tended to be the ones that included attending other events or targeting meetings in specific geographic areas.

- Asset mapping workshops with communities
- One-on-one interviews during LRTP update
- Online surveys
- Public events like farmers market, community festivals, and school registration
- Regional forums
- Transportation stakeholder committees at county or city level
- Utilizing other agencies such as United Way for outreach
- Web updates through local economic development organizations

2. Does your agency utilize social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) to try to engage the public? Have you found this to be successful?

Six agencies do not use social media. Of those that do use social media and specified which service(s), twelve agencies mentioned using Facebook and four mentioned using Twitter. Most agencies reported limited feedback and participation, and many questioned how successful social media efforts were. Agencies noted that social media works best for providing updates rather than seeking input, and is a more successful engagement tool at the project level.

3. Has your agency made any specific efforts to reach out to minority or low-income populations or persons with disabilities? If so, please describe.

A range of answers was received regarding outreach to these populations. Examples included:

- Add representatives of these groups to distribution lists
- Check meeting locations for ADA accessibility
- Conduct meetings specifically with these population segments
- Distribute surveys/information in languages other than English
- Divide planning area into distinct areas and hold public input meetings in each
- Hold public meetings in areas that have higher percentages of these populations
- Involve stakeholders from these groups on working groups and committees
- Outreach through the Passenger Transportation Plan process
- Outreach through public transit, including posting meeting information on buses
- Participate in ethnic and cultural events
- Provide notices regarding accommodation on meeting agendas
- Use university or college to reach out to limited English proficiency populations
- Utilize translation services, such as CTS LanguageLink
- Work with staff from specialized agencies, such as Center for Independent Living and Department for the Blind, on improving communication for people with disabilities

Passenger Transportation Plan

1. What components of the PTP development process (such as timeline/deadlines, TAG meetings, public input and outreach, and data gathering and analysis) present the greatest challenges to your agency?

There were a few persistent themes among responses, which are summarized by the following.

- Conducting public outreach
- Gathering data
- Getting responses on private provider surveys
- Local agencies providing the match for transit-related projects
- Maintaining TAG participation
- Pursuing projects with limited funding

Most of these topics were discussed at the [August 2014 PTP workshop](#). The Iowa DOT will continue to work to provide assistance to planning agencies in these areas.

2. Please describe your Transit Advisory Group. What organizations are involved? What topics have the group focused on? How is the group involved in project selection? Has the TAG improved coordination and communication between transportation providers and human service agencies, and has it resulted in any new projects or initiatives?

Most agencies utilize a regional TAG primarily facilitated through the planning agency. However, several agencies utilize one or more of their county human services advisory councils to act as their TAG, and have been able to include the PTP as a standing agenda topic for that group. Utilizing transportation groups through agencies such as the United Way or Area Agency on Aging was also mentioned.

Some TAGs primarily review projects that are required to be in the PTP, which at this point are limited to 5310-funded projects. TAGs also tend to review other transit projects that may involve federal or state funds, or locally-funded services that are brought forth by TAG members. Most TAGs also review ongoing needs and challenges, and may rank or update these annually.

Overall, TAGs were reported to have improved communication between transit agencies, human service providers, and private transportation providers. A couple key challenges that were noted included that many agencies are not active participants in the TAG, and that limited funding availability makes it difficult to incentivize participation.

3. What components of the PTP development process would you like to have additional guidance or clarification on? Are there types of training or assistance we could offer to help you with the PTP?

The following suggestions were made for providing additional guidance or examples. Some of these were addressed at the August 2014 PTP Workshop, and the Office of Systems Planning will continue working to improve guidance in these areas.

- Best practices for TAG involvement
- Better data collection methods for school districts and private providers
- How statewide human services agency coordination can assist with local coordination
- Insurance issues related to sharing vehicles or drivers
- Project ideas when there is little to no funding available
- Provide all PTPs online
- Success stories of TAG or PTP initiatives

Transportation Improvement Program and Programming Process

1. Do you have a formal award letter or agreement for agencies that receive STP or TAP funding from your agency? If you do, please attach a copy.

Six agencies noted that they do have an award letter or agreement, and several others noted that they have in the past or are looking to add this to their process. This can be a beneficial addition to the programming process for several reasons. It provides documentation to the project sponsor that their project is included in the TIP, can serve as an opportunity to verify project information as shown in the Transportation Program Management System (TPMS), can identify Iowa DOT district or central office staff that the project sponsor will need to work with, and can provide a brief overview of federal regulations and a reminder that projects for which federal reimbursement will be requested cannot proceed until FHWA authorization is granted.

Examples were provided from several agencies currently using an award letter and/or agreement.

- [Corridor MPO](#)
- [DMAMPO](#)
- [RPA 14](#)
- [RPA 16](#)

2. Please provide an estimate of the typical percent of your STP funds allocated among different projects types (such as maintenance/resurfacing, full reconstruction, capacity improvements, safety improvements, transit, planning, transportation alternatives).

While most agencies used the categories listed above, a few combined categories or did not provide estimates. Also, there is likely some overlap between categories. For example, reconstruction or capacity projects may involve safety improvements, or roadway projects may involve complete street elements related to bicycle, pedestrian, or transit accommodations. The following statistics are based strictly on the information provided. Full or partial estimates were provided for all MPOs; estimates were not provided for four RPAs, so RPA statistics are based on a total of 14 agencies.

The first two tables provide statistics by funding category for MPOs and RPAs. The third table provides an overall average of how funds are spent among the seven categories.

MPOs	Agencies Mentioning Category	Percent of STP spent			
		Average	Median	High	Low
Planning	2	8%	8%	14%	2%
Maintenance/ resurfacing	6	47%	35%	95%	10%
Reconstruction	5	57%	63%	80%	20%
New construction or capacity improvements	5	26%	19%	66%	5%
TAP or bicycle/pedestrian	3	37%	27%	80%	5%
Transit	2	24%	24%	37%	10%
Safety	2	9%	9%	15%	3%

RPAs	Agencies Mentioning Category	Percent of STP spent			
		Average	Median	High	Low
Planning	9	2%	1%	5%	1%
Maintenance/ resurfacing	13	88%	95%	100%	60%
Reconstruction	5	18%	15%	40%	5%
New construction or capacity improvements	1	5%	5%	5%	5%
TAP or bicycle/pedestrian	2	12%	12%	20%	4%
Transit	5	3%	2%	5%	1%
Safety	2	5%	5%	5%	5%

Overall Average	MPOs	RPAs
Planning	1.8%	1.4%
Maintenance/ resurfacing	31.5%	88.3%
Reconstruction	32.0%	6.5%
New construction or capacity improvements	14.7%	0.4%
TAP or bicycle/pedestrian	12.7%	1.7%
Transit	5.3%	1.0%
Safety	2.0%	0.7%

3. How much detail do you require for cost estimates for projects submitted for STP or TAP funding? Are cost estimates vetted in any manner?

The level of detail required for cost estimates generally fell into the following four categories.

- Itemized cost estimate with units and unit cost broken out
- Conceptual or planning level cost estimate with overall categories (such as preliminary engineering, right of way, construction, etc.) broken out
- Level of detail is at the discretion of the project sponsor
- Lump sum only – no detail required

While most agencies answered the same for both STP and TAP funding, four agencies noted that they require more detail on TAP applications.

Regarding vetting, only a few agencies specifically mentioned a vetting process, which was either by utilizing the Technical Committee or a professional engineer.

4. Does your Policy Board allow federal funds to be utilized for preliminary and/or construction engineering?

All nine MPOs allow federal funds to be used for engineering purposes.

Of the RPAs, 12 allow federal funds to be used for engineering purposes, though one agency noted that this is only allowed for STP projects and not TAP projects, and one agency noted that it is rarely used for such. Six do not allow the use of federal funds for engineering activities.

5. Do your jurisdictions complete TIP projects in a timely fashion? Do you have any type of time constraint on when STP and TAP projects must be let (for example, within a certain time period from the year the project was programmed for)?

Only two agencies specifically reported concerns with the timeliness of projects, and both have implemented timeframe requirements to help address these issues. Multiple agencies noted that TAP projects tend to lag or take longer to complete.

About two-thirds of agencies have some type of time constraint on TIP projects, with the possibility of reviewing projects and reconsidering funding allocations if the constraints are not met. However, it appears that this type of policy is not typically enforced. The main methods for adding a time constraint to the programming process are:

- Requiring that projects make progress (defined in different ways, such as project agreement signed, project let, construction complete, etc.) within a certain timeframe, most often two or three years from the program year in the TIP.
- Limiting the number of years projects can appear in the first year of the TIP (disallowing automatic carryover beyond a certain number of years) or requiring the project realistically be on schedule for letting in the next fiscal year to be included in first year of the TIP.

6. Please describe the process you use for mid-year TIP amendments that involve increasing funding for projects or adding new projects to the program.

Most agencies responded with their revision process as outlined in the TIP and/or Public Participation Plan (PPP), often discussing the difference between administrative modifications and amendments. Agencies do need to follow their procedures in this regard. However, in addition to this process, adding funding to existing projects or adding new projects to the program should involve the agency utilizing its normal project solicitation process. Outside of RPAs that suballocate funding, projects are selected via a competitive process, and all eligible sponsors should be allowed to compete for available funding. In other words, a jurisdiction should not be able to request a project addition to the TIP without a call for projects from any interested jurisdictions, and a jurisdiction should not be able to arbitrarily swap out a programmed TIP project for another project.

7. Do you review TIP projects in relation to natural resources or environmental justice? If you do, please describe how.

Six agencies responded that they do review TIP projects in relation to natural resources or environmental justice. The main method is by overlaying project locations with resource maps. Other ways that were noted included asking for a minority impact statement or environmental information with the project application, and reviewing overall funding equity based on the location of projects relative to environmental justice populations.

8. If your Policy Board suballocates funding, please describe any efforts staff has made to encourage a regional project selection process. Have you had any complaints from jurisdictions that are not allocated funding?

MPOs are not allowed to suballocate funding (see CFR 450.324 (j)), and RPAs are encouraged not to suballocate. Of RPAs that have partial or full suballocation, none noted recent complaints regarding the process. RPAs that suballocate are strongly encouraged to explore other programming methods that involve a regional approach. There are several steps an RPA can take to transition a strict suballocation process toward a competitive process, including utilizing and reviewing project applications, allowing jurisdictions to ‘borrow ahead’ on funding, and providing funding opportunities for all eligible project sponsors, including county, city, transit, and Iowa DOT projects. Iowa DOT staff are available to discuss this issue with Technical Committees or Policy Boards if desired.

Long Range Transportation Plan

1. Have you begun incorporating performance measures or targets into your planning process or documents? If you have, please describe how.

Most agencies answered this question with regard specifically to their LRTP. Of the nine MPOs, three have incorporated specific performance measures into their LRTPs, four have incorporated performance measures into their LRTPs in some manner (perhaps as less formal indicators or examples of ways to review success), and two do not have performance measures in their current LRTP. Of the 18 RPAs, three have performance measures in their current LRTP, and several agencies mentioned that they were looking to add performance measures to their next LRTP. It is unclear if many of the agencies that have developed performance measures are tracking those measures, or how the measures are otherwise being utilized. One method that was noted was analyzing potential LRTP project impacts relative to performance measures, and utilizing that in the project scoring or selection process.

The Iowa DOT will continue to coordinate with MPOs and RPAs on integrating performance-based planning requirements as MAP-21 draft and final rulemakings are released.

2. How do you develop population and employment forecasts for your LRTP? Please describe the data source(s) and method(s) you utilize in developing your forecasts. Does your Policy Board approve future forecasts or control totals?

Most agencies use one or a combination of the following data sources and methods to develop their population and employment forecasts:

- Census trends, including linear (numerical change) and geometric (percent change)
- Census Transportation Planning Products data
- CommunityViz GIS tool
- Dun & Bradstreet data
- Infogroup employment data
- Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages
- Regional Economic Models, Inc. (REMI)
- Review of jurisdictions' comprehensive and future land use plans
- Woods & Poole data

Four MPOs noted that their Policy Board does specifically approve their population and employment forecasts during LRTP development. Eight RPAs noted that their Policy Board does not approve forecasts, other than indirectly approving them when the LRTP is approved. The remaining MPOs and RPAs did not specify whether their forecasts are approved.

Population and employment forecasting will be discussed in more detail in the updated LRTP guidance the Iowa DOT is developing. Agencies working on updating their LRTP are encouraged to discuss forecasting with their District Planner and the Office of Systems Planning.

3. For MPOs, do you have any type of user agreement that you require when providing travel demand model files or data to jurisdictions or consultants? If so, please attach a copy.

Three of the nine MPOs have a user agreement for such purposes. Any MPO interested in developing such an agreement is encouraged to contact the Office of Systems Planning.

4. Do you review LRTP projects in relation to natural resources or environmental justice? If you do, please describe how.

All MPOs provide some level of review of natural resources and environmental justice considerations. This typically involves overlaying project locations with maps of these resources and areas. Some MPOs take this a step further and classify potential impacts to projects on a general scale (such as minor/moderate/major), or review the equity of projects relative to environmental justice areas. Some MPOs also include environmental considerations in their project selection process for the LRTP.

RPA LRTPs vary quite a bit in terms of the level of discussion of natural resources and environmental justice. Most provide a high level discussion of the issues, and some provide mapping of these areas. Several also discuss the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and its implications for the development of federal aid projects. Few RPA plans discuss the relationship of long range projects to environmental resources/areas, as most RPA plans are not project specific outside of the current TIP timeframe.

Miscellaneous Planning

1. Outside of city and county planning and engineering staff and elected officials, what other local groups or agencies do you work with on a consistent basis? Examples could include school districts, chambers of commerce, health departments, county conservation boards, etc. Please include what activities you were involved with these entities on.

A wide range of agencies and activities were described. The list below summarizes those agencies that were mentioned outside of the typical planning process. This list could provide a starting point for agencies looking to broaden their outreach, as many of these groups would have an interest in the transportation planning and programming process.

- Airport staff
- Bicycle coalitions
- Chambers of commerce
- County Conservation Boards
- County Emergency Management
- County Health Department
- Economic development interests
- Environmental agencies
- Freight interests
- Housing organizations
- Human service agencies
- Interest groups for transportation initiatives
- Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation
- Local law enforcement
- Local Resource Conservation & Development council
- Main Street groups
- Military personnel
- School districts
- State legislators
- Trail/active transportation groups
- Tribal interests
- United Way
- Universities and community colleges
- Veterans groups

2. Do you coordinate with neighboring RPAs or MPOs on the development of any of your planning documents, or in any other planning efforts?

Most agencies coordinate with their neighboring planning agencies in some manner. The most extensive coordination tended to be between MPOs and their surrounding RPA, regardless of whether they are housed within the same agency or not. Coordination between adjacent RPAs was also common, particularly for corridor studies or regional efforts, such as trail development. Some agencies have worked jointly on Passenger Transportation Plans or grant applications. A few agencies also coordinate by participating in neighboring agency committees, such as bicycle/pedestrian groups, or sending their LRTP to adjacent planning agencies for review.

3. Are there specific times of year that your transportation planning staff is especially busy? Are there any deadlines for required transportation planning documents that are difficult to meet?

A couple agencies noted that fall was a busy time, but the majority of agencies noted the winter/spring or spring timeframes as their busiest, with many citing TIP and TPWP (and PTP in certain years) development and deadlines as the main factors. While there is not much room for moving deadlines associated with the draft and final TIPs and TPWPs, agencies are encouraged to work with their District Planner and Systems Planning/Program Management staff if they would like an early or expedited review of draft items.

4. Outside of your LRTP, have you been involved in non-motorized (bicycle, pedestrian, or water trail) planning efforts? If so, please describe.

All agencies reported involvement in non-motorized activities, with most citing a number of projects or initiatives. The list below highlights the diversity of these activities, which include transportation, recreation, and health focuses. All of these items were mentioned by at least two agencies, with most being mentioned by more than four agencies.

- Assist in development of complete street policies
- Cross-regional efforts with trail development
- Develop bicycle and/or pedestrian plan for MPO or RPA
- Develop trail plan for MPO or RPA or a particular trail or jurisdiction
- Facilitate or participate in bicycle/pedestrian committee or user group, regional trails committee, or local trail users group
- Grant-related initiatives
- Participate in local visioning, healthy community, or Blue Zones efforts
- Perform walkability studies and/or participate in IWALK efforts
- Safe Routes to School type initiatives
- Specialized efforts (air quality campaigns, bike-to-work day, bicycle racks, etc.)
- Specialized groups (river-related, air quality-related, etc.)
- Sponsor bicycle/pedestrian related projects or studies
- Water trail planning

5. Have you conducted counts of bicyclists and/or pedestrians? If so, please describe.

About half of the planning agencies reported having conducted counts, with most counts being of trail users. The temporal and spatial coverage of the counts varied from a handful of counts every couple years to intensive week-long counts to annual programs of many count locations. The methods for conducting counts included:

- Record bicyclists/pedestrians during intersection counts
- Trail counters (infrared and tube were mentioned)
- Video counts (MioVision was mentioned)
- Visual/manual trail counts

6. Does your MPO or RPA have a complete streets policy? If so, please attach a copy or provide a web link. Do you know of any jurisdictions in your planning area that have a complete streets policy?

Three MPOs have complete streets policies, and a couple other MPOs are considering developing them. No RPAs currently have a complete streets policy. Eight cities were mentioned as being known to have policies.

7. Have you been involved in any freight-related planning efforts? If so, please describe.

Eight agencies mentioned involvement in freight-related planning. Example activities included:

- Freight committee or user group
- Freight-related study of particular facilities (such as transload facility, rail yard, etc.)
- Freight-related study of region or particular corridor
- Grant-related activities, including Revitalize Iowa's Sound Economy (RISE), Iowa Clean Air Attainment Program (ICAAP), and the Rail Revolving Loan and Grant Program (RRLGP)
- Provide staffing to freight-related entities

8. Does your transportation planning staff administer projects or studies on behalf of your jurisdictions? If so, how frequently?

About two-thirds of agencies responded that they do or have administered projects or studies for their jurisdictions. Most reported administering planning projects, enhancement-type projects, multi-jurisdiction projects or studies, or projects that had been awarded grants.

9. Does your agency charge for providing grant writing services or other activities requested by jurisdictions (such as conducting surveys or studies, performing traffic counts, etc.)?

Most agencies reported charging for some services, with methods ranging from ad hoc to having a cost schedule for activities. The main themes among the responses to this question included:

- Do not charge for transportation-related work
- Do not charge for grant writing, but possibly charge for other services (depending on scope and time required)
- Charge for grant writing if application is funded
- Charge for services that are for one particular jurisdiction
- Charge for grant writing and other services

10. Does your agency host or participate in a Multi-Disciplinary Safety Team (MDST)? If so, please provide some basic information, such as how often you meet, what type of agencies are involved, and what topics you discuss.

Ten agencies participate in or host an MDST or similar group, and two of these agencies participate in more than one MDST. Meeting schedules vary, with groups being relatively equally divided between meeting monthly, every other month, and quarterly. A couple other agencies have expressed interest in starting a group.

Agencies that were mentioned as typical MDST attendees included:

- City and county planning and engineering staff
- Communications center staff
- County emergency management
- Emergency responders
- Governor's Traffic Safety Bureau
- Institute for Transportation (InTrans) at Iowa State University
- Iowa DOT (district and central office, motor vehicle enforcement)
- Law enforcement (city, county sheriff, state patrol)
- MPO/RPA staff
- Other transportation interests, such as public transit, airport, railroad, or pipeline
- Tow truck firms

Common activities for MDSTs included:

- Coordinate work activities or safety campaigns
- Crash analysis or review of other local safety issues
- Enforcement and traffic control efforts for special events
- Incident management planning, including diversion routes
- Post-incident review and analysis
- Safety-related traffic studies
- Upcoming projects and construction zone management
- Weather-related planning or initiatives

InTrans and Iowa DOT recently partnered on a report related to MDSTs, which was developed based on a survey of current MDST members and a series of focus group meetings. The aim of the report is to document what helps result in a successful MDST for those who are looking to start MDSTs or whose MDSTs are struggling. This report is available under the Safety section of the [Planning Resource Guide](#).

11. Have you made any changes to your planning process or outreach efforts as a result of your Title VI plan? If so, please describe.

About half of planning agencies reported making changes to their planning process or outreach efforts related to Title VI. Examples reported included:

- Add Title VI Plan and information to website
- Advertise meetings with entities associated with environmental justice populations
- Collect Title VI-related statistics at public meetings
- Have self-identify language cards at agency office and public meetings
- Include additional analysis of project locations relative to environmental justice populations in TIP process
- Make documents available in languages other than English
- Provide accommodation notice on meeting agendas
- Provide training to staff
- Provide verbal translation services through in-person translators or services such as CTS LanguageLink
- Update Public Participation Plan to integrate Title VI requirements